

The Army

ARMY

The Sinai

UNEF I DIARY

The Sinai

El Arish

EGYPT

11 March
1965

to

14 Jun
1966

John

The Army Years - The Sinai

• SOS

10 Mar

1965

• Emb
Canada
+

posted

Middle

East

11 Mar

1965

I arrived at El Arish Airport in Egypt in the Sinai Desert in ^{of} ^{via} Athens & Pisa Italy where we had stayed over night. The only thing I remember about Pisa is lousy spaghetti served as an entree - no sauce, no meat, no cheese - just cold spaghetti. I remember the Pisa tower & ringing the bell, I remember a funeral with the hearse drawn by horses and the bathtub in the hotel. Why the bathtub? - because it was shaped like a chair with a seat that you sat in not lay down in. Very practical for reading.

^ Athens we stayed in a few hours and was a 100% American base - a good view of the Acropolis. Then came the dreaded trip across the Mediterranean to the mysterious Middle East. We finally hit the coast of Egypt & were not disappointed at all there as far as the eye could see was sand. And as it on cue from

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a grade B movie - there was the lonely Arab on his camel. One Arab, one camel & miles from anywhere. He was set out there like a stage prop - too improbable to be true.

The North Star turned east after hitting the coast and within 5 minutes we were in our noisy descent to El Arish Airport.

The Egyptians ^{occupied} had 90% of the airport including the tower. They had several Mig fighters which rarely flew but were always being run up at full throttle on the ground. Egyptian soldiers were drilling now & then if you could call their marching "drill." The soldiers left the impression they were "putting in time" being soldiers. No bunkers. No tanks. No anti aircraft guns.

The North Star arrived at El Arish once a week from Canada with parts, mail, equipment & replacement people. The North Star's

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most important function was not to bring people in - it was to take people out - to take them home.

Remember United Nations Emergency Force One or UNEF 1 had a one year unaccompanied posting attached to it. Later, much later it was changed, with UNEF 2 to 6 months posting.

When you asked a person how long they had been in the Sinai they never answered your question.

Rather they answered 40 days to go, or 2 weeks to go. Always 'xx days to go' - never how long they had been there.

One remembers vividly important events in one's life. I can remember where I was when President Kennedy was assassinated & remember Walter Cronkite describing the first manned Moon landing - two big events in my lifetime. Well I also remember vividly arriving at El Arish.

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I was relieving Captain Bob Emberly, an officer I knew from my first Army posting at 4th Transport Company in Winnipeg. He met me & took me under his wing. I was whisked through the rather cursory customs & immigration (carried out by a ~~man~~ the same person). His only task appeared to be to check the passenger list to ensure there were no Jewish names. This I later found strange because the Arabs were surprisingly tolerant of their Jews & Christians. Bob Emberly loaded me in his Citroen 1 1/2 HP small little car. It had four seats fabric laced over the seat frame as one would find on a lawn chair. You felt the car was so small you could pick it up & throw it. The car was painted white with the blue UN painted on the doors. The El Arish airbase was 8 miles from the El Arish camp where we stayed, on the coast near the sea; called Marina Camp.

ARMY

Chapter 2

EGYPT

The Sinai

Arrival at
El Arish
Egypt

We got off the North Star on the main runway. We could not go to the small United Nations Hut & Hangar because a month previously a Yugoslav plane of the same weight had gone through the taxi strip.

A few hasty repairs had been made in order to get the DHC Caribous and Otters in and out. But no way a heavy laden North Star Aircraft of 4 engines